

Timed Transcript for IMLS Office of Museum Services Webinar: Museum Grants for African American History and Culture FY 2021 Information Session

0:03

Hello and welcome to the Institute of Museum and Library Services' webinar, "IMLS Museum Grants for African American History and Culture Fiscal Year 2021 Information Session."

0:15

My name is Mark Isaksen. I'm a Senior Program Officer in the Office of Museum Services, and speaking on behalf of the rest of the staff, we are delighted that you are interested in preparing an application for the IMLS Museum Grants for African American History and Culture program.

0:32

I'll be referring to this grant program throughout the presentation as "AAHC," which is the abbreviation we use for the program.

0:43

In this webinar, I will cover the following topics: Where to find information; the goals of the AAHC grant program and a little bit about its history; the IMLS and AAHC funding eligibility criteria.

1:00

I'll talk about project funding levels; project activities; allowable and unallowable costs; the application components; the Narrative review criteria; where to learn more; and a few tips and next steps.

1:19

This is one of a series of webinars designed to help you find the information you need to create a competitive application for IMLS museum funding.

1:29

"Choosing a Funding Opportunity for FY2021" is available as a video and as a PDF of the slides.

1:36

In that webinar, we cover the IMLS vision, mission, and strategic plan, with an emphasis on how they influence our grantmaking.

1:45

We also address institutional eligibility, provide a quick overview of all of our funding opportunities, how to find information online with a focus on our website, and we cover the three places you must be registered in order to apply for an IMLS grant.

2:03

In addition to this webinar on the Museum Grants for African American History and Culture program, we are making available on-demand webinars for all of our museum grant programs.

2:13

A complete list of available webinars can be found at [WWW dot IMLS dot gov forward slash webinars](http://WWW.dot.IMLS.dot.gov/forward/slash/webinars).

2:26

The IMLS website is an important place to find information. When you go to the website, you will see a drop-down menu for 'Grants' on our homepage. Click on the section titled 'Apply for a Grant.' This section of our website is for you.

2:45

Each grant program has a landing page on the IMLS website. Here, you will find a brief overview of the grant program, contact information for the IMLS staff assigned to this grant program, and your primary point of contact if you have questions.

3:02

You'll also find a link to the PDF of the Notice of Funding Opportunity. The Notice of Funding Opportunity, sometimes referred to as the NOFO, is the official instructions and guidance for how to prepare, complete, and submit an application for funding.

3:18

The text and information I'm using in this webinar derive from the instructions and guidance found in the Notice of Funding Opportunity. A NOFO is available for each of the grant funding opportunities.

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Now, let's discuss the Museum Grants for African American History and Culture program in more detail.

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The goals of this grant program are to build the capacity of African American museums and support the growth and development of museum professionals at African American museums.

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The AAHC grant program supports projects that nurture museum professionals, build institutional capacity, and increase access to museum and archival collections at African American museums and Historically Black Colleges and Universities, known as HBCUs.

4:09

IMLS welcomes applications from museums of all sizes and geographic areas, whose primary purpose, as reflected in their mission, is African American art, life, history, and culture.

4:24

The AAHC grant program was created by an Act of Congress in 2003, the same act that created the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

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The legislation that created the museum directed IMLS to create a grant program to improve operations, care of collections, and development of professional management at African American museums.

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The AAHC grant program is designed to strengthen the institutional capacity in the African American museum community across the country.

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This map shows the range of IMLS AAHC grants from 2006 to 2020.

5:03

We've had over 576 applications, and funded 215 of those, and awarded over \$22 million, and we've used 201 peer reviewers during that time.

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Here are the figures for the most recent application cycle. The amount of funding available in this grant program, and all IMLS grant programs, is determined by the U.S. Congress through the federal appropriations process.

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Although Congress has yet to pass a final budget for FY 2021, which begins on October 1st, we anticipate that the funding for this program will remain the same as the prior year.

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In FY 2020, we made 22 awards for a total of two point seven million. The average size of each award was \$124,136.

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General IMLS funding eligibility criteria can be found on our website, and as shown in the screenshot image on the right side of this screen. This general criteria applies to most of the IMLS grant programs, including AAHC.

6:15

To summarize, you are likely to be eligible to receive funding if you meet the IMLS definition of a museum, as described on our website, and are a non-profit organization, or part of a state or local government, or an institution of higher education.

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Individuals are not eligible to receive funding from IMLS. Only the entities listed above are eligible.

6:45

In addition to the general eligibility criteria, the AAHC grant program has specific eligibility criteria that is described in the Notice of Funding Opportunity.

6:56

To be eligible for an award under the FY2021 Museum Grants for African American History and Culture program, you must qualify as one of the following:

7:07

A museum whose primary purpose, as reflected in its mission, is African American life, art, history, and/or culture;

7:16

or you can be a non-profit organization serving museums, whose purpose, as reflected in its mission, is to support museums identified above. So, for example, a museum service organization that focuses on African American museums;

7:36

or you could be one of the 107 Historically Black Colleges and Universities. HBCUs qualify even if they do not have a museum.

7:49

Our next topic has to do with how much funding your project requires. The size of your project, and how much you are requesting in federal funds, will determine the cost share requirement and how many applications you are allowed to submit.

8:04

There are two options to consider.

8:08

Option 1 is to apply for an amount of federal funds between \$5,000 and \$50,000. If you elect Option 1, then you do not need to provide a cost share.

8:18

This option is designed for smaller scale projects that require less than \$50,000 in federal funds.

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Option 2 is to apply for an amount of federal funds between \$50,000 and \$250,000. Now, if you elect this option, then you must provide a 1 to 1 cost share.

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The second question is, how many applications may you file?

8:41

If you choose Option 1 and request between \$5,000 and \$50,000 with no cost share, you are limited to one application in this cycle.

8:51

If you choose Option 2 and request between \$50,000 and \$250,000, with a 1 to 1 cost share required, then there's no limit on the amount of applications your museum may submit.

9:05

Now, let's consider the kinds of projects that are supported in the AAHC grant program.

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You may apply for projects including, but not limited to, the activities listed here. Projects designed to support the growth and development of museum professionals at African American museums may involve such things as: hosting paid internships at African American museums;

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or creating mentorship opportunities for emerging and mid-career staff to connect with, learn from, and engage with senior leaders and founders in the African American museum community;

9:37

or creating learning and growth opportunities for museum staff to build skills and enhance knowledge and expertise in museum-related subjects and areas of need.

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Projects designed to build the capacity of African American museums might involve: increasing the number of museum professionals working at these museums to enable the museum to expand its educational programs, to engage with the community, to enhance the operations of the museum, or to provide for increased and improved care of collections.

10:14

IMLS encourages museum professionals and institutions to share and adopt best practices by creating skill-building and capacity building, capacity-expanding programs that are applicable across all levels of museum staff to ensure the highest standards in all aspects of museum practices and operations.

10:37

Now, let's turn to the allowable and unallowable costs for your project.

10:42

Be very careful in preparing your proposal and include only allowable costs in both your IMLS request and your cost share. To do otherwise can hurt your chances of getting positive reviews and being recommended for funding.

10:57

I'll go through some common expenses that are allowable and unallowable, but for the details, you can always check out Title 2, Subtitle A, Chapter 2, Part 200 of the Code of Federal Regulations.

11:09

We often call this "2 CFR 200," for short, and there's a link on this slide that you might want to check out.

11:19

The regulations are available online, and there's a very easily searchable list of allowable and unallowable costs, and these apply to all federal grants.

11:31

In the Notice of Funding Opportunity for this grant program, we provide a partial list of the most common expenses of allowable costs. Some of these are listed on this slide.

11:43

These costs may be part of what you ask IMLS to pay for or what you will pay for as part of your cost share, if one is required. Rules on allowability apply to both sides of the budget, cost share or grant funds.

11:56

So, allowable costs could be personnel salaries, wages, and fringe benefits; travel expenses for key project staff; materials, supplies, software. You see this list, and these are pretty common examples of allowable costs.

12:15

We also provide a list of unallowable costs. Again, these apply for IMLS funds and for cost share.

12:22

These costs may not be part of what you ask IMLS to pay for, nor can they be part of what you will pay for as part of your cost share. In fact, unallowable costs shouldn't show up anywhere in your proposal.

12:38

So, as you prepare your application, it's a good idea to compare your list of proposed expenses against these lists of allowable and unallowable costs, as well as in the Federal Cost Principles, 2 CFR 200.

12:50

The most common things that we usually get questions about are items related to construction or renovation of facilities, advertising and public relations costs, and things like that. Just remember that what we want to see is things related to your project and project activities.

13:09

So, public relations or advertising related to, say, a new exhibit that is part of the grant request – the project is about a new exhibit – you can include advertising related to the new exhibit. General advertising or general public relations to promote the museum are not allowed.

13:31

Please contact us if you have any questions and you want to talk through some specific examples related to your proposed project.

13:40

Now that you have a basic framework on the amount of funding you can request and the allowable costs for your project, let's look at the parts of the grant application that you're going to need to prepare.

13:49

The application components are a series of documents that you will create and upload in Grants dot gov. These, all together, make up your application.

13:59

These application components fall into three categories. The first is that of Required Documents and all applications must include these. If you miss any of these, we might reject your application.

14:11

The second group is that of Conditionally Required Documents and some applications might need these. It depends on the nature of your project or your institution. We'll talk about some of those examples in the next slide.

14:23

The third group of application components are Supporting Documents, and these are optional and could be things that are helpful and important to support your project. And, again, we'll talk about a few of examples of those.

14:39

Now, your AAHC application consists of a series of individual documents, and it's important to make sure that you prepare and submit everything necessary.

14:48

All applications must include these 10 required documents.

14:52

The six documents on the left side of the slide are created by you, using a Word processing program on your own computer, then you save that as a PDF.

15:05

Instructions for all of these required documents are found in the Notice of Funding Opportunity.

15:10

Some of these have page limits, and if you exceed the page limit specified in the Notice of Funding Opportunity, we're going to remove any extra pages before it goes to review.

15:18

So, for example, the narrative is limited to seven pages. If you have an eight-page narrative, we will remove the last page. Make sure your content fits into the page limits specified, and that's particularly true when you convert your document to a PDF.

15:36

The Application for Federal Assistance, the IMLS Supplementary Information Form, and the IMLS Program Information Form are online forms you complete in the Grants dot gov environment.

15:48

The IMLS Budget Form is a fillable PDF. All the other required documents are created by you and then uploaded as PDFs in Grants dot gov.

16:01

The second category of application components is that of Conditionally Required Documents.

16:06

Now, some applications might need to include one or more of these, but it's your job to figure out which are required for yours.

16:13

So, for example, if you're applying as a non-profit organization, then you must include your proof of non-profit status letter issued by the IRS.

16:25

If you're using a federally negotiated indirect cost rate agreement in your budget, most often this is common for HBCUs, then you must include a copy of your final negotiated rate agreement.

16:40

If you're going to create digital products during the course of your project, then you must complete and submit a Digital Product Form.

16:47

And if you're requesting funds for conservation treatment for your collections, then you should include a detailed condition report or formal conservation treatment proposal.

17:00

Please note that the term "digital product" includes anything that's born-digital or digitized, any software, or any research data.

17:11

Look at the form and look at the questions, and hopefully those will bring to light some of the issues that we want you to cover in the Digital Product Form.

17:20

It's a way for you to provide specific information that will be helpful to reviewers to understand how prepared you are in your project.

17:31

The third group of application components is Supporting Documents. Supporting documents are completely optional. You may submit some or none.

17:40

We urge you to make good decisions here and include only those that supplement the narrative and support the project description you provide in your application.

17:49

This is not the place to introduce new information. The kinds of supporting documents you choose to include may vary, depending on the project activities you're proposing.

18:00

So, here's some examples of the kinds of supporting documents you might want to include in your application.

18:05

These examples are some of the things that peer reviewers, who will be reading your application, will expect to see.

18:11

These documents help support the case you're making in your application, and that tell us that, if you're funded, you can be successful in completing your project.

18:21

So, for example, projects that focus on organizational capacity-building like adding new staff, you want to include these types of supporting documents: a position description for the new staff, including assigned duties and required qualifications; and maybe some documentation about how you determine the salary and benefits for this new position, so that we know that you reflect industry standards and prevailing wages for the local area;

18:55

Maybe an organizational chart or a description of the leadership and supervisory structure of your organization, showing how this new position will fit in among your current staff.

19:07

These are just ways for the reviewers to get a deeper understanding of your proposed project.

19:13

Now, for projects that support the growth and development of museum staff or interns that are already at your organization, again, position descriptions for interns, including expected duties and learning outcomes;

19:26

Maybe recruitment plans, including letters of support from HBCUs or other institutions of higher education that you're going to reach out to;

19:35

Maybe a needs assessment of training needs for your staff, identifying knowledge gaps; or maybe some new learning objectives from training programs or career development experiences that you have identified as suitable for you and part of your project activities.

19:56

When we talk about the care of collections and how we're going to improve access to those collections and the care of those collections, the kinds of things that we look for here in supporting documents might be some summary information about the scope and scale of your museum collections, baseline information on the numbers and types.

20:18

So, say for example, you want to propose cataloging a collection. You're going to hire somebody to catalog that collection and create something at the end, that might be a finding aid. It might be helpful to know, well, how big is your collection? What is the backlog? How important is this proposed part of your collection, and how does it fit into the general extent of your collection?

20:44

You might also include some benchmarks on the quantity of collection items to be processed and cataloged or digitized in the proposed project.

20:52

You might talk about the audience. So, if you want to increase access for a particular audience, what do you know about that audience and have you surveyed them? Is there some information you can share here in the supporting documents?

21:05

Is there a management policy or collections policy that you might want to include to show us how well you manage your collection and how you set priorities?

21:15

These examples are some of the things, again, peer reviewers who are reading your application, looking at your narrative, might want to know more, and they'll look in the supporting documents to answer those questions about wanting to know more.

21:33

Among the required components of your application, the Narrative is the section that reviewers are likely to spend the most time reading, so let's examine the narrative section of the application.

21:45

In the AAHC grant program, the narrative is limited to seven pages and is divided into three sections: the Project Justification, the Project Work Plan, and the Project Results.

21:58

The questions we ask you to answer and the review criteria by which your application will be judged are posted in the Notice of Funding Opportunity.

22:07

So, let's look at the Project Justification first. In this first section of the narrative, you should lay out the reasoning for your project. Tell us in the clearest terms possible what you propose to do.

22:23

What need, problem, or challenge will you address? Who or what will benefit?

22:29

How will your project build the capacity of your institution? And how does it meet the goals of this grant program?

22:36

And reviewers are going to evaluate your proposal on just those things: How well you explain your project; how well you've identified the need, problem, or challenge that you will address; how well you've supported that with relevant evidence;

22:50

Whether you've identified who or what will benefit from the project, and if this audience has been involved in the planning; whether your project enhances the capacity of your institution in ways that are specific, actionable, and measurable.

23:12

So, in this section of the narrative, you're really focusing on defining a need, problem, or challenge.

23:20

In the justification, you want to focus on what the government is wanting to do with this money, which is to help improve something, see that something gets better at your organization.

23:34

So, as you define your need, problem, or challenge, articulate what's going to get better as a result of your project and use as precise terms as possible. So, is someone going to learn something? Are they going to develop a skill?

23:50

Or maybe an attitude will change, an attitude or behavior? Will members of your community be better able to work together to solve problems? You're building skills in community engagement.

24:04

Will your collections be better cared for? Maybe some of your collections are in jeopardy. Will they have a longer lifespan now? Will they last longer?

24:14

Will access be easier for the researchers and members of your community that want to get access to the collection?

24:21

Focus on the problem that you're trying to solve and be really clear about it here, and use any data that you can to help support your justification.

24:33

The second part of the narrative is the Work Plan. Now, in this part of the Work Plan, we ask you to tell us what specific activities you will undertake;

24:43

Who will plan, implement, and manage your project; when and in what sequence your activities will occur;

24:50

What financial, personnel, and other resources you will need; how you track progress toward achieving your intended results; and how you're going to share those results.

25:00

Reviewers look at all of those questions. They want to know that your project activities are informed by appropriate theory and practice; whether the team you put together has the experience and skills necessary to complete the work successfully. That's why we ask for resumes for key staff, so they can look at that very thing.

25:23

They want to know whether the schedule is realistic and achievable. That's why we also ask for a Schedule of Completion, to see, can this all get done?

25:32

And they look altogether at your project to see if the time allotted, the personnel, and the financial resources are appropriate for the scope and scale of the project.

25:46

Now, please note, also, that in your budget, you're going to be required to add \$3,000 per year for travel to an IMLS-designated meeting.

25:55

This is noted in the instructions for the Work Plan and you'll put that in the budget.

26:02

You'll add this in the travel section of the IMLS Budget Form, and you'll put it in the federal grant funds side of the budget.

26:08

This expense item is used to cover your participation in a convening of grantees at a place and location to be determined by IMLS.

26:23

So, let's think about this section of the narrative a little more deeply. In the Work Plan, we really want to know, what are the activities that you're going to be doing?

26:37

An activity is something that someone does. It has a beginning and an end, just like projects, and you know when you've finished it, because it doesn't need to be done anymore. Something's completed. It's no longer on your to-do list.

26:52

An activity is not a goal or a result or an outcome, rather, it's something you do as part of striving to achieve those things.

26:58

So, when you're listing your activities, don't get too bogged down in detail. Focus on the high-level activities here, just so that we can understand all the things that you're thinking of doing during this project, and what it's going to be like when it's done.

27:21

Speaking of being done, that's what we're looking at in the final section of the narrative, the Project Results. This should be devoted to articulating the impact of your project:

27:33

What results do you intend to achieve that are going to address that need, problem, or challenge you identified at the beginning of your narrative?

27:42

Remember, something's going to get better, so we want to know what that is.

27:47

Tell us about the tangible products that will result from your project, and also, how you're going to sustain the benefits of your project. What happens when the project's done? Does it end, or does something continue?

28:01

Reviewers will give us their opinions on how well you've designed a feasible plan for collecting and reporting data related to evaluation; how likely the improvements that you've proposed will be realized; and how useful the products will be that you're going to create.

28:18

When thinking about results, we really want you to find ways to measure success. We want to make sure you're thinking about this at the beginning of your project design.

28:29

So, when we define the need, problem, or challenge that your project is addressing, you said someone's going to learn something, but we want to know, how will you know if they've learned it?

28:43

If your problem is related to engaging with your community, how will you know that's been achieved?

28:51

If collections are going to be better cared for, how are you going to know and are you going to measure "better"? If you're digitizing to expand accessibility, well, how will you know you've done it? That you've increased accessibility?

29:11

So, remember, all your results should tie back to your need, problem, or challenge.

29:19

The focus on results and measuring success in meaningful ways is not something new, but it's certainly not easy.

29:29

We know that you're going to do a lot of work under this project, and we want to make sure that you've measured success, measured how you're going to be successful.

29:39

A tool for that is a logic model. If you want more information about logic models, we have a whole website devoted to that, and that helps you articulate the need, the challenge, and the results in a really easy format.

29:54

Reach out to one of us if you want to know more about logic models, but right now, let's just summarize the narrative and what we've discussed up to this point.

30:12

All these pieces of your application – there's so many pieces of this application, right? And there are four general characteristics of successful applications that reviewers will look for.

30:28

As you prepare your application, we want you to keep these general characteristics in mind. These are the things that we've seen, over and over, make for successful applications.

30:38

The first is, there should be some institutional impact. We want to know that your project is going to build the capacity of your museum or support the growth and development of museum professionals at your museum or HBCU, so there should be some demonstrated impact.

30:53

The second thing we see in successful applications is in-depth knowledge. Your project should reflect a thorough understanding of current practices and knowledge about the subject matter.

31:03

So, if you're saying you're going to digitize your collection, what do you know about digitization? Or how are other museums doing it? If you know other museums have done digitization, what are some best practices?

31:14

How are you applying those, or adapting those, to be successful in your organization?

31:21

The third thing we see in successful applications is project-based design. We want your work plan to have a set of logical and inter-related activities that are tied to directly addressing the key need or challenge.

31:34

The fourth is demonstrable results, measurable results that tie back to the need or challenge it was designed to address.

31:41

Applications that have all of these four characteristics embedded in all the documents, they're going to stand out in the review process and they're the ones that are most likely to be successful in getting funded.

32:01

So, about our funded grants, we do have a list of them, and you can go to the IMLS website, where you can find the awarded grants and search by the grant program, if you're interested in those funded in AAHC. You can search for those funded in your state.

32:19

All of our grants are listed there, and there's a short summary of the institution and the project activities that they have proposed, as well as how much funding they received.

32:32

This might be extremely helpful as you put ideas together, to find similar kinds of projects. Reach out to those organizations, ask them questions, and see what helped them be successful.

32:45

We also have posted some sample applications, including the Narrative and Schedule of Completion, for a cross-section of successful applications from this most recent grant cycle, from 2020. We have four applications posted there.

33:00

These are in the Sample Applications section of the IMLS website. Scroll down the page to the AAHC examples.

33:07

Now, looking at these proposals might help clarify your thinking. Again, these are just the seven-page Narrative and the Schedule of Completion, not the full application.

33:21

So, what happens after the application deadline? Well, IMLS program staff will look at those applications for completeness and eligibility.

33:30

They're then sent out for external peer review to museum professionals around the country. Reviewers then meet as a group to discuss each application.

33:40

The scores and written comments are provided directly back to all applicants. These can help you be more competitive in a future application cycle.

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For those applications that are funded, we know that the reviewer comments will often help grantees be more successful with implementation of their project.

33:59

These peer reviewers provide scores and comments based on the criteria outlined in the NOFO.

34:04

IMLS staff will look at budgets, financials, and past performance records for past and current grantees.

34:14

We then prepare materials for the IMLS Deputy Director and also the Director of IMLS.

34:22

And by law, the IMLS Director is charged with the authority and responsibility to make final award decisions, and this happens in the month of May.

34:32

In June, we notify all applicants by e-mail of the award decisions, and provide the scores and comments created by the reviewers.

34:40

And on July 1st, 2020, the funded projects begin – July 1st, 2021. Excuse me.

34:49

At this point, we'd like to share a few tips elected from our experience in working with applications submitted to the AAHC program.

34:56

So, right now, one of the first things you can do after you've listened to this webinar is make sure that you've completed all your registrations. You must have a DUNS number, active SAM dot gov registration, and a current and functional Grants dot gov registration.

35:12

You need to have a DUNS number in order to register with SAM, and you must have a SAM registration to go into Grants dot gov, and you must have a Grants dot gov registration to submit an application to IMLS.

35:25

It's crucial to remember that your SAM dot gov registration expires each year. SAM dot gov is where anyone doing business with the federal government needs to be registered.

35:37

You can log in to SAM dot gov at any time and find out your status, and you should try to do that today, just to be sure that you're up to date and active.

35:49

So, remember, our legislation states that we can make grants only to eligible applicants that submit complete applications on or before the deadline.

35:58

To help you do that, we want to make sure you do your background research, and by listening to this webinar, you're on your way by doing the research.

36:07

Follow the Narrative outlined in the Notice of Funding Opportunity. Use the headings and numbered sections in the NOFO narrative – the Work Plan, the Justification, the Results – all those bullet points. Just follow those.

36:22

Avoid generalities and acronyms, because the people who review your application are experts, but they might not be totally familiar with your particular field's shorthand, so make it easier for them to understand what you mean. Check your spelling, grammar, and math, because that will be noticed, if there's any mistakes.

37:41

Ask a colleague to read everything before you send it in. It's always good to have fresh eyes looking at your materials.

36:50

Have them pretend like they're a reviewer. Again, be sure your application is complete and you have all the required components, and submit to Grants dot gov early so you can correct any errors.

36:50

Sometimes Grants dot gov will bounce things back with an error message, and we definitely want you to find that out before 11:59 PM on November 16th. Grants dot gov is open now, so you can submit now. We will only accept the application that has the latest date on it.

37:23

So, if you submit one today, which is incomplete, and you submit one next month before the deadline and it's complete, we'll look at the one that's submitted closest to the deadline.

37:39

So, to recap your next steps, go to IMLS dot gov and read the Notice of Funding Opportunity. Check your organization's registration with SAM dot gov and Grants dot gov.

37:53

Connect with us. Listen to our webinars, but more importantly, talk with program staff.

38:04

Prepare your application. Start now, getting all those pieces together. Start those conversations, and start writing, and make sure it's complete. And then, submit it before the deadline on November 16th, 2020.

38:19

In closing our presentation today, I want to make sure you have our e-mail address and direct phone number. Don't hesitate to call or e-mail either of us with questions or concerns.

38:32

Thank you and have a great day.